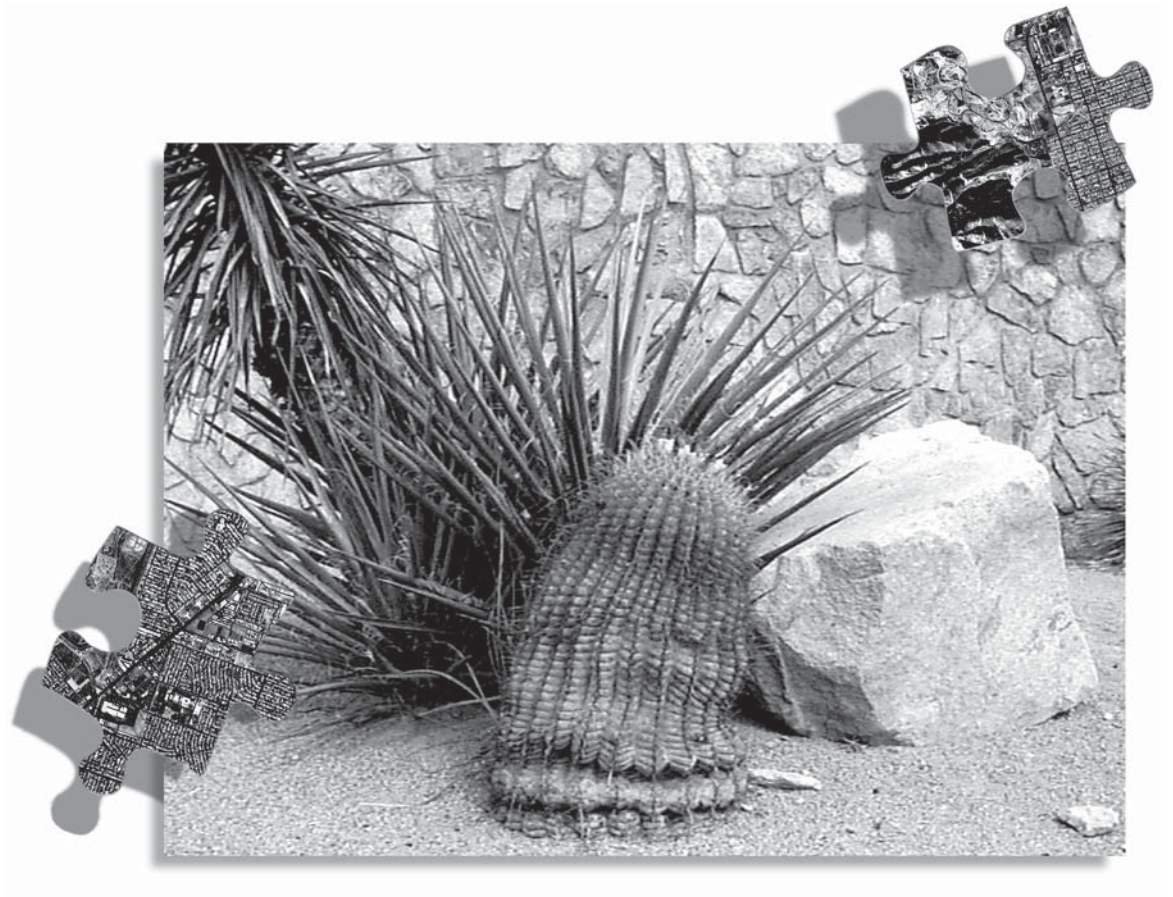


The Southwest

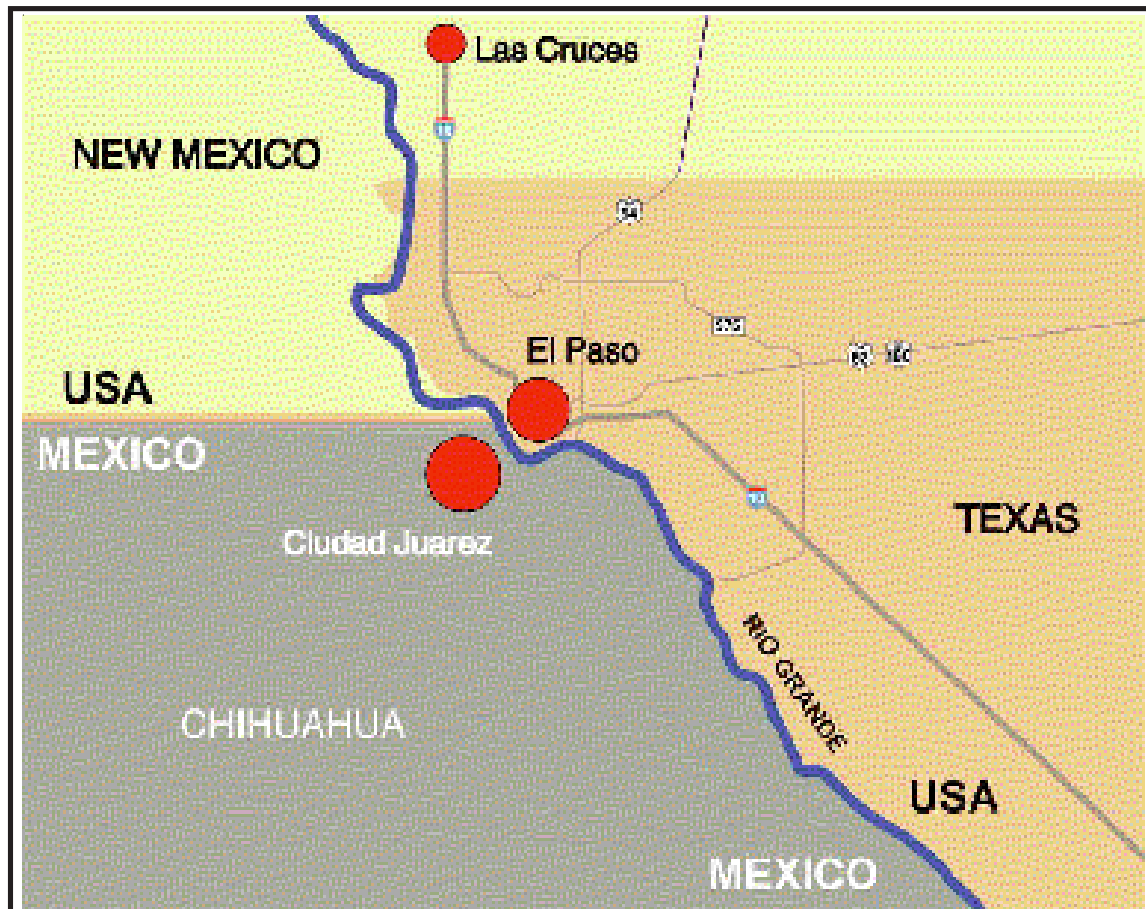
THE SUN CITY



Located on the border to two states and one country, the fourth largest city in the State of Texas and the seventeenth largest in the United States, the City of El Paso is a dynamic city with a colorful history. The City's location, abilities and culture provide its citizens with the ingredients necessary for success. El Paso is strategically located to become an international gateway to and from Mexico, has the labor force necessary for business expansion and the historical and cultural resources desirable for generating tourism.

Location

The City of El Paso is shaped by its location on the U.S. - Mexico border as well as its natural and man-made geographical boundaries. Located in the Chihuahuan desert along the northeastern bank of the Rio Grande, El Paso is at the extreme western edge of Texas bordering the Republic of Mexico and the state of New Mexico. The Franklin Mountains, the southern ridge of the Rocky Mountains, physically divide the city. On the U.S. side of the border, El Paso is the largest municipality for several hundred miles. The cities of El Paso, Texas; Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua; and Las Cruces, New Mexico as well as surrounding municipalities have been culturally and economically linked for more than 400 years, see *Map Atlas*.



El Paso Quick Facts

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| Official Logo | "at the corner of Texas and Old Mexico" |
| First use of "El Paso" for area | April 25, 1598 |
| Original name | "El Paso del Norte" or the "Pass of the North" |
| Time Zone | Mountain Time Zone |
| Official Altitude: | 3,762 feet |
| Latitude and Longitude | 1° 45' N and 106° 29' W Latitude and Longitude |
| Average annual rainfall | 8.4 inches. |
| Oldest road in the U. S. | "Camino Real" or "King's Highway" |
| Famous Inhabitants | Billy the Kid, Pancho Villa, and John Wesley Hardin |
| Hueco Tanks State Park | An Indian habitat dating back more than 2,000 years |
| International Bridges | 5 bridges connect the U.S. with Mexico in El Paso |

Communities in the Paso del Norte metropolplex include municipalities in three states and two countries—Texas and New Mexico in the U.S. and Chihuahua in Mexico. All of these communities are linked by the Rio Grande river corridor and the international boundary. While outsiders may find the unique relationships in the Paso del Norte region hard to grasp, residents of the region understand the inter-connectedness of these communities straddling the border. Importantly, the

border is a physical boundary that gives the sister cities of El Paso and Juarez their urban form, but also shape its people. Despite this, many border issues are governed by national priorities rather than local needs; these entities manage the physical reality of the border on a daily basis.



Historic El Paso

El Paso is shaped by a remarkable cultural heritage that is an indelible part of the City's character. Native American inhabitants left their mark at what is now Hueco Tanks State Park with pictographs as old as 2,000 years old. El Paso's first European settlers sprung the Spanish colonial tradition. The Native American Tigua people also settled in the region by the 1600s. The area reverted to Mexican control as a northern territory until the mid-1800s.



Above: Hueco Tanks State Park.

El Paso has a long and rich history. The historical birth of modern El Paso dates back to 1536 when the first Europeans set foot in the area. On April 30, 1598, Juan de Onate, standing on the banks of the Rio Grande near present-day San Elizario, took formal possession of the land for King Philip II of Spain, in a proclamation called "La Toma". During the revolt of the Pueblo Indians in 1680 throughout New Spain, Spaniards and christianized tribes of the Pueblos retreated to the El Paso river valley and established two new missions: Ysleta-1692 and Socorro-1693 and a presidio-San Elizario (1789). European traffic through El Paso del Norte increased during the 17th century. The spiritual and cultural settlements of Ysleta, Senecu, San Lorenzo, Socorro, and San Elizario also served as way points for *conquistadores*, traders, and merchants traveling the Camino Real.

The outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846 and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 made significant changes by fixing the boundary between the United States and Mexico at the Rio Grande and establishing a military post at Fort Bliss.



Increased trade brought settlements and Anglos to the region. Soon after, war between the United States and Mexico broke out. In May 1846, American troops marched south along the Camino Real and entered El Paso unopposed; the town became an important quartermaster center for the United States Army. In February 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war and a considerable amount of territory north of the Rio Grande (including present day El Paso County) was ceded to the United States.

El Paso was further shaped by the westward expansion of pioneer America through the 1800s. The City's



Above: *The Rio Grande on its Pre-Chamizal Treaty course through downtown.*

pattern of growth was disrupted during the Civil War. However, the economy soon recovered when rail lines were laid through town and the railroads brought more settlers to the region. Hundreds of cheering people met the first Southern Pacific train that entered El Paso on May 26, 1881. The City became a railroad hub and prospered. Along with the economic boom, growth posed new problems for the relatively young city—incorporated on May 17, 1873 by charter from the Texas Legislature.

Growth continued through the 1900s. From 1910-1920, the Mexican Revolution caused a massive migration of Mexicans to El Paso. Yet from 1930-1940, the Great Depression forced many Mexicans back across the border, resulting in a loss in the City's total population. The booming cattle and mining industries helped restore El Paso's economy by providing jobs. In addition, the area became a center for manufacturing and wholesale trade; over two hundred factories and three oil refineries servicing the southwestern United States were located here. The Texas State School of Mines and Metallurgy was established in 1914 and renamed twice - Texas Western College in 1948 and The University of Texas at El Paso in 1967.

The onset of World War II triggered a boom in El Paso's economy and population. Fort Bliss—with roots at the turn of the century—became a major military training center. By 1942, Fort Bliss was the largest Army base in the nation with over one million acres in north central El Paso County and in New Mexico. After the Second World War, Biggs Air Force Base also established itself as an important military post in the region. Fort Bliss is currently the largest air defense center in the world.

El Paso retained the greatest population of all the cities in the southwest until the mid-1950's. Downtown El Paso grew as high rise buildings were added during the fifties and sixties and the Central Business District (CBD) housed city, county, and federal government facilities as well as financial and banking institutions. Improvements to El Paso's transportation network and the growing reliance on the automobile encouraged suburban expansion during this time. Large scale, low-density urban sprawl became widespread. During the sixties, business and industry decentralized and downtown began to decline. Higher income residents moved towards the fringes of the City. Along with post war prosperity, El Paso experienced more urban problems. Traffic congestion, high levels of air pollution, housing shortages, overcrowded schools, unsightly commercial strips, soaring crime rates, and other detriments tarnished the City's quality of life.



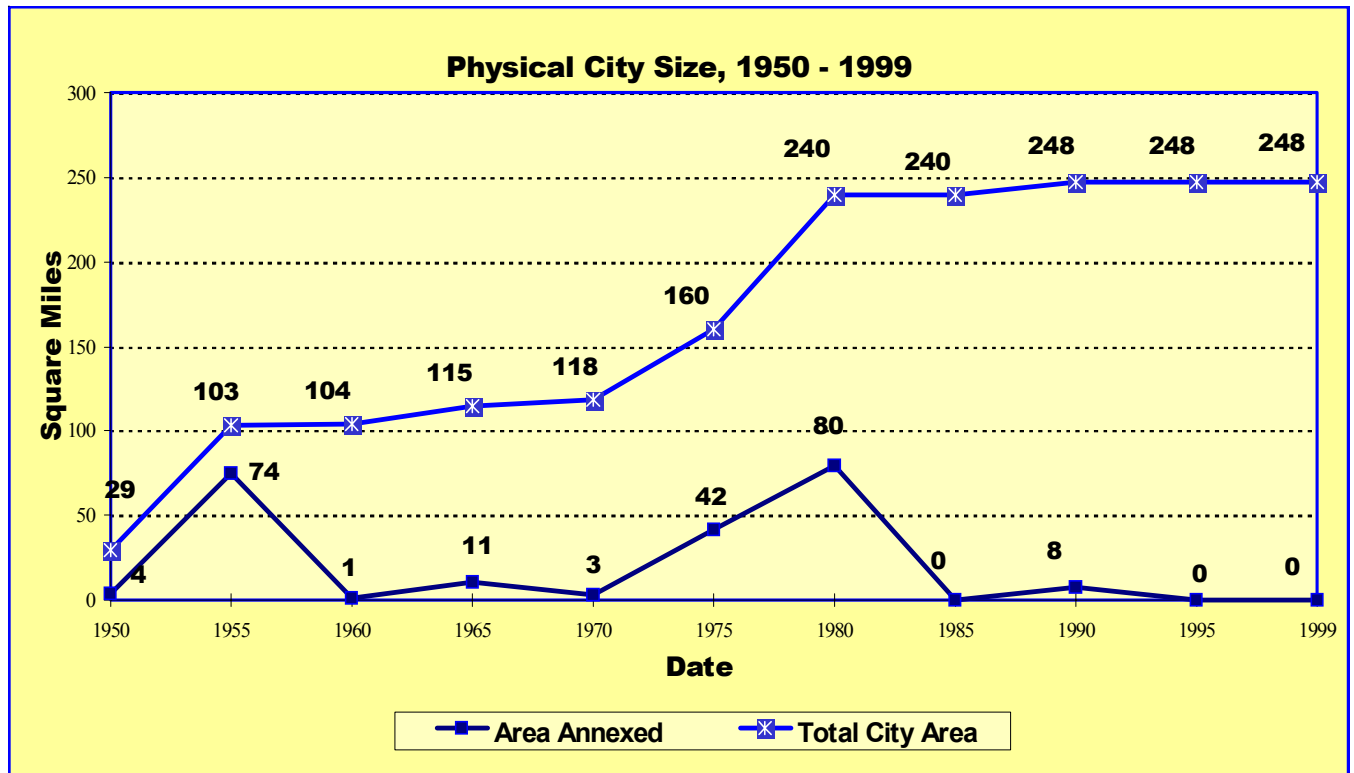
El Paso's growth from the early seventies to the present is closely related to the international north-south bi-national transportation corridor. El Paso's border location has served to connect U.S. and Mexican industrial and manufacturing interests and thus create a regional economy with many trade components across the border. For example, trade between Mexico and the United States increased when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was approved in November 1993. The metropolitan population of El Paso and neighboring Ciudad Juarez grew to nearly 1.5 million by the mid 1980's as population growth across the Mexican border in Juarez outpaced El Paso's.

Contemporary Issues Facing El Paso

The City of El Paso, Texas has changed substantially in the last fifty years and significantly in the last decade. Following the end of World War II, El Paso, like other southwestern cities, experienced spectacular growth. From a population of 130,000 in 1950, the City grew to 277,000 in 1960, 322,000 in 1970, 425,000 in 1980 and 515,000 in 1990 (see **Demographics Chapter**). In this time, the City's physical size increased from 25 square miles in 1950 to 247.4 square miles in March 1999 as the figure shows.

The direction and pace of growth is a key issue to consider for El Paso's future. The necessary infrastructure to accommodate new industries, increased trade, and a growing community need to be in place to prevent declines in the area's quality of life. Quality of life concerns thus constitute a set of issues to consider concurrently with development. Environmental concerns about the region's air quality and water resources are also important to consider to enable continued and sustainable growth. Health and environmental problems have affected the quality of life in El Paso as well. For example, as the area draws more ground water from dwindling underground bolsons and from the Rio Grande, a sustainable region-wide supply is in question. In addition, employment opportunities for the growing population need to be secured to ensure the economic vitality of the City.

Figure 2.1: Physical City Size in Square Miles, 1950 to 1999.



Urban Growth Pattern of El Paso, Texas.

